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SUBJECT: MUNGIKI: KENYA'S LARGEST CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION

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11. (SBU) Summary: The Mungiki, a large criminal organization operating within the Kikuyu community, has a network of supporters within the government bureaucracy and political leadership. It's use of extreme violence to amplify its influence through terror and its parallel government weakens the authority of the Kenyan state. The Government's professed desire to eradicate the Mungiki is hampered by the organization's political and official connections. Combating Mungiki requires more than merely mass arrests of alleged members. Targeting Mungiki leadership is likely to produce better results, but requires confronting its supporters within the ranks of Kenya's governing class. End Summary.

From Tent of the Living God to Organized Crime

12. (SBU) The Mungiki criminal organization has its origins in an offshoot of a small religious sect among the Kikuyu community. Around 1989 a group of younger members split off from the Tent of the Living God, a religious sect operating in Kikuyu-dominated regions of Central and Rift Valley provinces that calls for a rejection of Christianity and Western culture in favor of a return to traditional Kikuyu beliefs and culture. The group broke from Tent of the Living God when the Tent's charismatic leader appeared to be moderating his views in order to win acceptance by Kikuyu elites. The group adopted the name "Mungiki," meaning "the masses." Ndura Waruinge (see reftel), then about 18 years old, emerged as the Mungiki leader. Waruinge is the grandson of a notable Mau Mau leader during the revolt against the British colonial administration in the 1950s. Under Waruinge's leadership, the group took on Mau Mau trappings (such as oathing rituals, the dreadlock hairstyle, etc.) and an increasingly political orientation.

13. (SBU) Like the Mau Mau before them, the Mungiki preach Kikuyu nationalism, not Kenyan nationalism. They identify rhetorically with the "poor and oppressed" against the elites and the Kenyan state. They often proclaimed in their early years that the task of the Mungiki was to complete the work of the Mau Mau by "cleansing" Kikuyu culture of Western influence and freeing the state from the grip of corrupt elites serving foreign masters.

14. (SBU) The Mungiki grew rapidly during the 1990s, a time of severe political turbulence and violence surrounding the movement to restore multiparty democracy to Kenya. The Moi regime instigated ethnic violence against Kikuyu communities

in Rift Valley Province through private ethnic militias-for-hire in 1992 and then again in 1997. Radicalized and dispossessed Kikuyu youth who had seen their communities burned to the ground during these attacks flocked to Mungiki for protection and vengeance. Many of these new members, recently having lost their rural homes, relocated to Nairobi slums, especially the Kikuyu-dominated slum of Mathare, which became a Mungiki stronghold.

15. (SBU) While many Mungiki followers in rural areas retained a religious and cultural orientation, throughout the 90's, in Nairobi, Nakuru and the principal towns of Central Province (the Kikuyu heartland), the Mungiki increasingly emphasized radical subversive political rhetoric and adopted a military style organization. The Mungiki became less a militant religious sect and more an urban political militia and criminal gang. Initiates answer to captains who take orders from local coordinators who in turn serve under national coordinators. Members only know the identity of those in their cell and the captain supervising their cell. Immediate compliance with orders from above is required from all members. Once having taken the initiation oath, members cannot leave the organization. Betrayal of Mungiki is punishable by death.

16. (SBU) Urban Mungiki in the mid-1990s became involved in vigilante activity to "protect" Kikuyu slum dwellers. This led to the development of protection rackets first in the slums and housing estates and then on public transport routes. The Mungiki fought successfully for protection turf against smaller traditional extortion gangs, ostensibly in the name of reducing rents and fares for the common man. They also came into increasing conflict with the police.

17. (SBU) By the late 1990s, as the Mungiki grew in numbers and wealth, they attracted the attention of political and business leaders in the Kikuyu community. The Mungiki hired out their services to Kikuyu politicians (both ruling and opposition parties) and business leaders (mostly landlords) as enforcers and intimidators. Many members, especially those directly involved in "fund raising," took on a less conspicuous look, shaving their dreadlocks in an attempt to maintain a lower public profile. By 2000 the Mungiki had recruited or infiltrated significant numbers of members and sympathizers within the ranks of the police and state bureaucracy.

18. (SBU) In March 2002 a force of about 250 Mungiki attacked the Kariobangi North housing estate in Nairobi, killing 20 residents and maiming over 30. Their particular targets were members of the rival "Taliban" gang, which is made up of members of the Luo ethnic group, but common residents of the estate were also attacked. Following this incident, which the press reported was preceded by numerous warnings to the police, all unacted on, the Moi government banned 18 "vigilante groups," including the Mungiki. Both Taliban and Mungiki leaders were arrested. The Taliban leader was subsequently charged. The Mungiki leader, Waruinge, was released without charge. Waruinge called on Mungiki followers to support Moi's KANU and its Kikuyu presidential candidate, Uhuru Kenyatta, even though many Mungiki were the victims of Moi-directed communal violence only five years earlier.

Mungiki Ideology, Aims and Practices

19. (SBU) Mungiki ideology is often contradictory, opportunistic and incoherent, but it contains a powerful appeal to Kikuyu youth in the slums who feel alienated from the Kenyan state and mainstream Kenyan society. Mungiki theology calls for a return to the worship of Ngai, the Kikuyu god resident on Kirinyaga (Mount Kenya). It vociferously rejects Christianity as an alien import responsible for holding the Kikuyu in "mental slavery" to "the West." And yet, Mungiki rhetoric is full of images and verse citations from the Old Testament meant to justify Mungiki actions and beliefs.

¶10. (SBU) The Mungiki political agenda is confused, but essentially calls for ethnic federalism in which all Kikuyu-inhabited areas will be united under the authority of the elders, the pre-colonial Kikuyu political system. This "Kikuyu state" may or may not be affiliated with similar ethnic states for Kenya's other communities. The political agenda is short on specifics and long on scathing critiques of the Kenyan state and the traditional elite it is held to serve at the expense of the common man in general and Kikuyu youth in particular.

¶11. (SBU) Mungiki arose in the context of the Moi administration's explicitly anti-Kikuyu policies. The fact that Kenya is now led by a Kikuyu-dominated government has taken some of the wind out of the sails of Mungiki's resentment-laden political rhetoric. That rhetoric has less relevancy today as Mungiki de-emphasizes religious, cultural and political purposes and now acts purely as a criminal organization existing only for the financial benefit of its leadership and members. Religious and political themes are used as a means of binding members to Mungiki identity, but do not appear to represent a sincere religious, cultural or political program.

¶12. (SBU) Multiple press reports refer to the Mungiki 12 Commandments. These commandments are illustrative of the Mungiki ethos, its military-style organization and modus operandi. Several recent incidents of Mungiki violence reflect this code:

-- You shall not smoke cigarettes, take frothed beer, wines and spirits but instead take traditional brew. That liquor remains prohibited to all unmarried but snuff is allowed to all, male and female members.

-- It is an abomination to be an uncircumcised Kikuyu male or female. (NOTE: Mungiki are infamous for forcible female genital mutilation. END NOTE.)

-- Never rape or defile or make love to a woman who is not your wife.

-- Never let any member be persecuted, humiliated or be taken hostage by any force, no matter how powerful that enemy is. Always fight back and if overwhelmed, retreat and seek reinforcement.

-- Any life of our member taken by an aggressor, or any of our property destroyed by that aggressor shall be avenged. Revenge at all times will be tenfold. In this, we are all bound by the sacred blood of our veins through an oath.

-- Enemies are traitors, deserters and any force that confronts us. Traitors are members who betray us, deserters being those who abandon our cause. Their punishment shall be death by beheading and their heads shall be dumped where they can be found as a testimony but their torsos should never be found. (NOTE: Several recent suspected Mungiki murders have observed this protocol. END NOTE.)

-- Sect's secrets shall not be discussed with non-members. Any member who contravenes this shall be punished severely.

-- All times observe peace, spreading our doctrine to our brothers and sisters, recruiting many to our cause and binding them through administration of the oath.

-- Always endeavor to raise resources to fund any of our calling and all our regional coordinators must at all times be on the lookout and utilize those avenues that will generate resources.

-- There shall be a set target for all regional coordinators, besides the resources that will be kept for sharing out by the unemployed members.

-- All our efforts shall be the recovery of our lost lands, the land of our forefathers where there was no hunger since water, milk, honey and meat were in abundance.

-- The sect's trademarks shall at all times be a club and a sword to clobber and slay its identified enemies.

-- All members shall at all times be at the ready, to be called at short notice to timely execute directives as shall be communicated to members through their respective regional leaders.

-- The hierarchy of the cause's command shall at all times be respected and the decision and resolutions of the national council shall be final and non negotiable, to be executed without question.

The Mungiki Today: Kenya's Largest Criminal Organization

¶13. (SBU) The Mungiki today are a large criminal organization with a network of supporters within the government bureaucracy and political leadership. It uses extreme violence to amplify its influence through terror. Some of the academic literature on the Mungiki paint its members as harmless rastafarians with a thirst for social justice. If this was ever the case, it certainly is not now. They are vicious, sadistic killers. Kenyan newspapers up until recently routinely referred to the Mungiki as a "banned sect," emphasizing its roots as an unorthodox religious group. These same newspapers, quite appropriately, now refer to Mungiki as a criminal gang. The Mungiki operate in significant portions of Central province, some parts of Rift Valley province (Nakuru area, for example) and much of Nairobi, especially along transportation routes. (NOTE: Official Government of Kenya figures show the public transportation sector clearing over USD 1.5 million a day nationwide. END NOTE)

¶14. (SBU) The Mungiki rule territory as vigilantes (keeping out rival gangs), cultural police (enforcing prim Mungiki dress codes on women, for example), extortionists (collecting monthly fees from residents and business owners) and a parallel judiciary (arbitrating family disputes and renter/landlord conflicts). The Mungiki raise funds through extortion, kidnapping, hiring out their gangs to politicians and business people, and charging for the use of public services (public latrines, for example) or illegal utility hook-ups (water and electricity). When under threat from either the police or the common citizenry, the Mungiki react savagely, with beheadings and public display of mutilated corpses. They employ terror as a means of intimidating opposition.

¶15. (SBU) The number of Mungiki members is very difficult to determine. Some press and academic speculations put the number at 1.5 million, but this seems to be a gross exaggeration. The Mungiki are a purely Kikuyu affair. The Kikuyu number about eight million out of a Kenyan population of 32 million. The total number of currently active Mungiki, including rural members not routinely involved in urban criminal activities, is likely under 100,000. Most observers believe that membership is static, hence the emphasis on intensifying activities. Members of Parliament from Mungiki-dominated areas are largely silent about the organization, due to intimidation, complicity or support. Minister of Defense Karume, who represents a Central Province constituency infamous as a Mungiki stronghold, recently called for the government to negotiate with Mungiki (drawing sharp criticism from the press). The general population is intimidated into silence and non-cooperation with the police. On occasion, however, Mungiki victims strike back. Public transport drivers and local residents in a small town outside Nairobi recently burned the homes of a number of Mungiki members in the area. The resultant battles left a policeman dead.

¶16. (SBU) Ndura Waruinge, the supposed Mungiki founder,

claimed conversion to Islam in 2000, stating that henceforth any move by the government against Mungiki would generate the fierce opposition of the worldwide Muslim community. Waruinge claimed in 2004 to have left Mungiki and to have converted to Christianity and become a pastor. Little credence is given to either "conversion." It is widely believed that Waruinge covertly directs the movement while his assumed status allows him to publicly move in political circles. He has formed a political party (Youth Empowerment Association) and announced plans to run for a seat in parliament. The alleged overt leader of the Mungiki is Maina Njenga. His large estate in rural Central province is said to include facilities for administering the Mungiki oaths and conducting Mungiki "baptisms." Although the police claim to be in the midst of a crackdown on the Mungiki, Njenga continues to come and go as he pleases.

Comment: Threat to the State?

¶17. (SBU) Are the Mungiki a unique phenomenon in Kenya? Yes and no. There are plenty of other vigilante/extortion outfits, murderous gangs, political militias, and thugs-for-hire. What makes Mungiki different is the scope, comprehensiveness and cohesiveness of the organization. No other criminal organization is as large. No other criminal organization is involved in so many different criminal enterprises. No other criminal organization is as well connected in politics and the bureaucracy. No other criminal organization has Mungiki's religious/cultural/political mystique with which to bind its members.

¶18. (SBU) The parallel government set up by Mungiki in parts of rural Kenya, certain Nairobi housing estates and slums, and in the transport sector is made possible by weak and ineffective governance. The operation of the "Mungiki state" then further weakens governance in those areas. The apparent collusion of politicians and officials with Mungiki hampers moves by the partially infiltrated police to confront the organization. The Mungiki are not a revolutionary, subversive organization, despite their early rhetoric. Mungiki does not pose a direct challenge to the state because it does not need to do so. Rather, Mungiki acts as an insidious force that counters efforts to improve governance and security in Kenya. Mungiki weakens the state as it bullies and extorts the "poor and oppressed masses" it purports to serve, while defying the state to do anything about it. It is a sad commentary about Kenyans' lack of faith in state institutions that so few consider recourse to the official administration when they suffer Mungiki crimes. If the Kenyan state ever became a credible threat to the Mungiki's existence, then the organization might indeed pose a direct security threat to the country's leaders. The Mungiki does not hesitate to attack and kill police officers who they have been unable to co-opt or coerce into ineffectiveness.

Comment: What Can Be Done?

¶19. (SBU) The membership of such a large group cannot be simply rounded up, arrested, tried and incarcerated. The government's current crackdown is resulting in many arrests of young men in Central Province who have no apparent affiliation to Mungiki. Mungiki members who are caught up in these dragnets are routinely bailed out by their fellows, who then pose a threat to the arresting officers. Several police officers have been murdered in confrontations with Mungiki over the last few weeks.

¶20. (SBU) A more effective approach would be to go after the leadership. However, the political and official connections of the Mungiki leadership make this difficult. Kenya's two largest daily newspapers, The Standard and The Nation, have both printed editorials accusing the administration of lacking the political will to confront Mungiki. Multiple reports indicate increasing disaffection among Kikuyu voters with the government's lackluster performance in reining in

Mungiki oppression. That vote is an absolute necessity for this government's re-election plans in December. That set of circumstances increases the odds for meaningful government action to curb the Mungiki.

¶21. (SBU) If the missing political will to confront the Mungiki leadership is ever found, then the Kenyan authorities may want to consider an approach successfully employed by United States law enforcement officials against our own large criminal organizations. Kenya's criminal statutes are often lax and difficult to prosecute. Internal Security Minister Michuki has publicly complained about this. Its tax laws, however, are draconian. Mungiki leaders would be hard pressed to explain the source of their income (as would a number of Kenyan politicians and officials). Confiscation of property and imprisonment for tax evasion of Mungiki leaders would put a serious dent in Mungiki operations to the relief of Kenya's battered citizenry in Nairobi, Central Province and elsewhere.

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